

PREPARING TOMORROW'S PEDAGOGY: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES

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Abstract. This study is a collaborative teaching/learning pedagogy that offers an alternative teaching approach to curriculum development for early childhood education in an effort to explore how to best teach a child in English language arts classroom. This study, based on Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, emphasizes observing children closely, identifying children's areas of strength, and uses those existing ones as the basis for an individualized educational curriculum along with facilitation from instructors, peers, and parents to maximize each child's learning potential. Through the use of local environment in which contains dialectically interaction relationship among peers and instructors, children effectively developed their language proficiencies. The study advocates that the teaching strategies to be employed should stress learning through class activities and through the instructors and parents. Classroom observation and parents' interview were conducted. Based on the positive findings, the combination of instructional strategies is continued. (contains 2 figures and 16 references)

Key Words: Early Childhood Education, Multiple Intelligences, Zone of Proximal Development

1. Introduction

With the focus on language, communication, and culture towards to a global village, children with fluent language communication capability in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are the major concern for all language instructors. Indeed, in the late 19th century, specific teaching/learning theories began to emerge. However, how to effectively integrate the theories into classroom teaching strategies that promote growth and advance child's learning is significant concern for all the educators. This study, based on Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory and Lev Semeonovich Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, emphasizes observing children closely, identifying children's

areas of strength, and uses those existing ones as the basis for an individualized educational curriculum along with facilitation from instructors, peers, and parents to maximize each child's learning potential. Techniques of how to implement these two theories to language arts at kindergarten with appropriate directions and roles of instructor will be presented in detail.

2. Sample and Course Description

The target population of this study consisted of three classes of 3- to 6-year-old pupils at a kindergarten (Royal Kids Kindergarten) in Taichung, Taiwan over a 5-month period. The course curriculum guide was designed by the researchers in an effort of establishing a broad base of philosophy of education for language learning children with some experiences, materials, and resources for implementation. The teaching method to be employed also stresses learning through the use of local environment in which contains dialectically interaction relationship among peers and instructors. The curriculum guide applied Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences (MI) and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory providing teachers with practical, thematic approach.

The semester course was designed in five units/topics. The five units/topic include eight lessons for each of the intelligences, conversation, science and discovery, logical-mathematical, spatial artistic, bodily/kinesthetic, (Orff) musical, inter- and intra/personal/social, and manners/courtesy regularly mixed in the monthly course curriculum. More importantly, the activities in each lesson were designed with certain challenging situation. They were just right enough for the child to be able to achieve without too much difficulty. Yet, they were not too easy. Given a little challenge, the child was to believe to achieve more than what he/she is "ready for" with his/her instructor or person who was more knowledgeable than the child. Through the reciprocal communication and guidance with adults and more competent peers, the child was expected to attain maximum knowledge.

Besides the lessons implemented in class, the curriculum also include take-home activities designed to strengthen the communication between home and school, and students' portfolio for collection throughout the semester, as shown in figure 1. The curriculum guide was delivered to all the instructors before each unit started and discussion regarding children's learning progress was required for each of the instructors during the monthly meetings.



Figure 1. Student Portfolio Sample.

Instruction was conducted throughout the semester and children received 7 hours of instruction per school day, including 3.5 hours for classroom lesson, and 3.5 hours for play and other outdoor activities, regardless of their levels of class. Each in-class course was administered by an individual who was a native speaker and some other activities were administered by one who was a bilingualist and had degrees in foreign language education and early childhood education.

3. Approaches and Methods

The communicative approach was the methods delivering course content in this study. The researchers believe that learning is more likely to occur if adults or more capable peers mediate young children's learning experiences (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986; Baroody, 2000; Kirova & Bhargava, 2002). The educational setting of learning and teaching in the ZPD are typically created in the face-to-face interaction mediated by speech between the learner and the adult or more capable person in an activity and depends on the nature and quality of that interaction as much as on the upper limit of the learner's capability. As Vygotskian view of learning (1978, 1986), the primary function of speech in both children and adult is communication, social contact. Therefore, communicative approach in context was the methods delivering course content in an effort to maximize each child's learning potential; the course activities were then assigned so that children could work with instructors, parents, and more experienced children.

Besides, children are best to learn and acquire knowledge relevant to their own life at the time they engage in (Wells, 1995; Wells, 1999; Wohl & Klein-Wohl, 1999). Particularly, the researchers agree there should be at least five additional ways learning (seven intelligences) other than traditional schooling focusing mainly on math and linguistic skills as advocated by Gardner (1993). Since then the eighth intelligence has been added to be one of the basic intelligences (Checkley, 1997; Roper & Davis, 2000). Therefore, the curriculum of this study was designed to enable students to develop mastery learning by allowing them to learn from communicative environment, human interaction, and meaningful, naturalistic, active learning experiences. In other words, the classroom operated in this study required a “relevant” arithmetic that was with real-life, authentic learning materials through the use of various group structures. Learning materials involved Gardner’s eight intelligences were also aimed to be meaningful for children and that incorporated into a task that was interesting and relevant for life. Indeed, most learning materials were designed in course activities of play. In Vygotskian best known statement about play, Vygotsky (1978) noted that, while playing, a child “is always behaving ... ahead above himself”. (p. 74) Also Elkonin (1978) and others (Vygotsky, 1977; Leong, Bodrove, Hensen, & Henninger, 1999) granted play the status of a “leading activity” for children of preschool and kindergarten age. Hence, the children in this study were to believe to produce higher achievement and better development in a meaningful cooperative instructional environment.

Each activity was designed as teachers used various intelligences. In addition to the traditional reading about the basic components of plants, for example, might have students to plant a bean plant. By watering their bean seeds, students were asked to measure how much their plants grow and to compare other peer’s ones. And students studying various parts of human body draw their own portrait in real-size shapes, made from outlining the body to point each part of their own body as figure 2 illustrated.

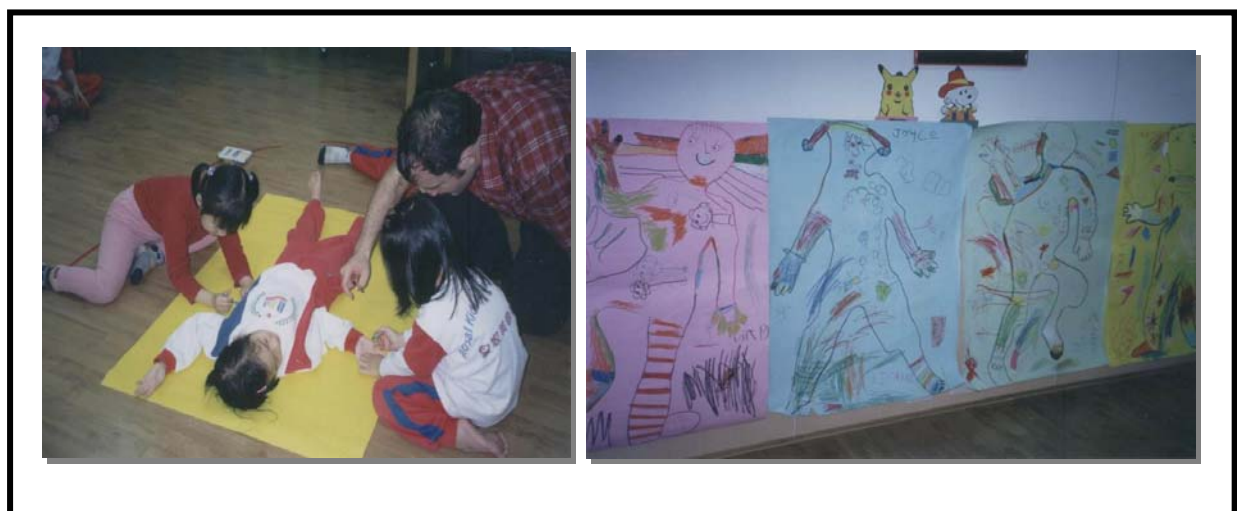


Figure 2: MI in the classroom

More importantly, other than these two major theories, the researchers strongly believe that having appropriate manners for daily life is very significant for each of children. The presenters will demonstrate a variety of class activities showing how these ideas can work together in one classroom to provide a complete education of the mind, body, and spirit into the early childhood curriculum.

4. The Teacher as Social Intervener and Mediator

The teachers' role in education, undoubtedly, is very crucial. The researchers suggested the instructors to play as a social intervener and mediator. The teacher is the social intervener who provides the ZPD for the child. With the assistance and communication of the teacher, children can often perform a better task that they are incapable of completing on their own. According to Vygotsky (1978), an essential feature of learning is that it awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is in the action of interacting with people in his/her environment and in cooperation with his/her peers. Children work and learn from each other as well as from the teachers. Meanwhile, the teacher should constantly provide support and explanation to better motivate children to be an active learner.

The teacher is also the mediator who wisely and constantly observes and records each child's learning for assessment purpose and individual identity, and also model and demonstrates learning patterns within each of the intelligence subject area. In this context, teachers mediate the challenges and problems as well as deliver their instructions in guiding their children through the social interactions of the cooperative learning/teaching environment. Children must be given the opportunity of learning "how to" not only by themselves or with their peers, but also with the teacher's help. In many cases, children try to solve the problems by themselves or with the assistance of their peers only, but that does not work all of the time. Therefore, teacher may be required to be there and give models and explanations that make them fully understand how to proceed with the learning (Wohl & Klein-Wohl, 1999).

Teaching monitoring along with a flexible instructional skill is also a necessity. In essence, no one set of strategies will work best for all learners at all times. As MI theory suggests, teachers should understand that children learn in different ways and provide opportunities for children to learn using a range of intelligences. Therefore, "good teachers" are expected to work from their students' needs, and to seek ways to tailor curriculum and help students learn (Hoerr, 2004).

5. The Use of the Checklists

When instructors continually monitor and evaluate children's understanding and learning through the checklists, they can build on the children's knowledge in contexts that

are meaningful to the children. The use of the checklist provided a means for checking children's understanding of the specific intelligences. The researchers used these checklists not to evaluate or determine mastery but to gather information that could be used for curriculum development, then to plan appropriate materials and learning experiences to facilitate children's learning in the multiple intelligences and zone and proximal development of these learning concepts. Yet, flexible use of checklists in any preschool classroom can light the instructors' ideas about how to set up the classroom and what questions to ask for the development of each child (Helm, Beneke, & Steinheimer, 1997). In addition, the checklists also used for performance assessments (as midterm and final exams) to determine how children carry out specific tasks that replicate real-life experiences. The researchers expected to prepare all of the children for literate functioning inside and outside school.

Besides the use of checklists, bi-monthly Parent's Day was an assistant guide for each instructor to learn how each individual children's progress that connecting school learning and home experience and thus make up his/her weakness and enthusiasm for the subject matter. Additionally, the Parent's Day was another opportunity for children to demonstrate their knowledge through active activities and for parents to interact with children. Moreover, a questionnaire survey to parents was used in the end of the semester to investigate how children carry out their learning at school into authentic experience at home/daily life.

6. Conclusion

Having embraced the Gardner and Vygotskian view of learning, the researchers found that the communicative environment between home and school, human interaction including teacher-directed- and child-directed group activities should be considered in the curriculum that focuses on multiple intelligences education. Feedback from instructors and parents indeed were also positive. Based on the positive findings, the program was continued in the setting of its original implementation.

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